

FROM

# HEAD- HUNTERS TO CHURCH PLANTERS

An Amazing Spiritual  
Awakening in Nagaland

Paul Hattaway

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# Foreword

When I heard that my friend Paul Hattaway was writing a book on the revivals in Nagaland, I was thrilled. His previous books have been a great blessing to many Christians, in Nagaland and around the world. With God-given wisdom he has written down many of the Lord's mighty deeds, and as a result people have fasted and prayed, motivated and inspired to stir up God's gift inside them.

For countless centuries, the various tribes of the Nagas have inhabited the hilly regions between the River Brahmaputra in India and the River Chindwin in Myanmar (formerly Burma). It is fair to assume that we have been most famous around the world for our former practice of head-hunting. Many books have been written about this.

Of far more significance, however, is the story of how the Lord Jesus Christ has sent great and powerful revivals among us over the last 50 years. The message of God's salvation first reached our people in 1872, but it was only in the 1950s that large numbers of us came to know Christ as our wonderful personal Saviour. Today, almost one million Christians live joyful lives in Nagaland. We have been conquered by God's overwhelming grace and love. Many individual lives have been transformed by the revivals, and there has been greater lay participation in the church's total ministry as many have discovered their calling from God.

I recommend *From Head-Hunters to Church Planters* as an accurate and incisive account of what God has done among the Nagas. May he be glorified through this book, and may your own heart be revived as you read the wonderful things he has done in Nagaland!

Gwayhunlo Khing

Director of Asia Soul Winners and former pastor of  
the Rengma Baptist Church, Kohima, Nagaland



# Introduction

After more than a dozen years as a missionary in various parts of Asia, I was both surprised and delighted when I had my first opportunity to enter Nagaland, a small mountainous state in north-east India.

Most of my years in Christian ministry had been spent in places where the truth of the gospel had yet to make any visible impact, in societies where the name of Jesus Christ was almost unknown. Invariably, our work had been with tiny groups of faithful Christians surrounded by millions of Buddhists, Muslims or Hindus.

Suddenly I was in Nagaland. I knew in advance that the majority of Nagas were Christians, but I knew little about how their conversion had come about or how their faith had fared after so long in isolation. For the best part of 50 years, all but a handful of foreigners had been banned from entering the remote Naga Hills.

After I arrived in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, I spent time with many Naga Christians, preaching in their churches, eating in their homes and getting to know them. I soon realized that I had met members of God's family, the Body of Christ, who reflected his beauty, humility, gentleness and faithfulness.

I started to wonder what kind of things could have happened among these people, a rare light in the midst of the overwhelming darkness in Asia. It is said that during the Naga revivals a person could drop a bundle of cash on the main street of Kohima and find it untouched the next day. The Nagas would never consider taking the money, as their lives were ruled by extreme reverence for a holy God.

As I came to learn later, the fruit of the Spirit that God has produced in the lives of nearly a million Naga Christians has

come at great cost, through many severe trials and tests of their faith and commitment. On my very first visit to these beautiful people I realized that someone needed to record their story for the rest of the world to read. This is my feeble effort.

I have tried to set down faithfully what has been told to me by Nagas from many different tribes, as well as what I have learned from written accounts. I have included a number of first-hand testimonies from church leaders who experienced the power of God during remarkable visitations to their villages and homes in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

There is a tendency today to associate 'revival' and miracles with charismatic churches, but there were none of those in Nagaland when God first brought revival there. These powerful and life-changing visitations came to orderly, conservative Baptist congregations. People who do not believe in miracles may pour scorn on some of the accounts in this book, but my challenge to them is simple: all of the names that appear in these pages are the actual names of real people, and all the places I mention are actual places. Readers can easily investigate for themselves by visiting these places and talking with the people, and can see and hear for themselves what happened when the Almighty God visited Nagaland.

I have also included a few testimonies of the kind of sufferings the Nagas have endured over the years as they have stood up for what they believed. My aim in telling just a handful of stories from those horrible years is not to distress and disgust the reader, nor to promote any particular political view. After much thought and prayer, I realized that in order to give an accurate account of revival among the Nagas I had to explain the circumstances that helped to prepare them to embrace Christ en masse.

I deeply appreciate the help I have received from many Naga church leaders, who eagerly agreed to be interviewed for this book. I think of the elderly Pastor Hopong of the Yimchung tribe, who walked through dense jungles and over high mountains for

several days just to reach the nearest road, so that he and a co-worker could catch a bus to Kohima to see me. His commitment to tell the story of how God blessed his remote tribe is typical of many Nagas, who are determined to record the remarkable things Jesus Christ has done among their people in the last 50 years.

May the Lord Jesus Christ be glorified, and may his kingdom come throughout the whole world as it has among the Nagas!

Paul Hattaway

# 1

## Who are the Nagas?

*From one man [Adam] he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.*

Acts 17:26

Nagas are a fine people, of whom their country is proud; strong and self-reliant, with the free and independent outlook characteristic of highlanders everywhere, good to look at, with an unerring instinct of colour and design, friendly and cheerful with a keen sense of humour, gifted with splendid dances and a love of songs.

Elwin Verrier, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*

As with all branches of the human race to survive since time immemorial without a written script, the ancient history of the Naga tribes of north-east India and western Myanmar (formerly Burma) is shrouded in uncertainty. Some of them still have oral stories, songs and poems recounting how their ancestors originated in Central Asia. Their legends tell of harsh migrations to the south, fleeing the oppression of the Chinese and hostile tribes.

Other accounts tell how the Nagas were once 'rulers of the oceans'. Even today, some of their women incorporate imported conch and cowry shells in their traditional jewellery and dress, even though the Naga Hills are situated hundreds of miles from the nearest sea. Some scholars have noted the cultural similarities between the Nagas and other head-hunting tribes such as the



Dayak and Kayan of Borneo, the Batak of Sumatra, the Igorot of the Philippines and various groups in Taiwan. All of these live near the sea.

The earliest reliable account placing the Nagas in their present location comes from the 13th century AD, when the Ahom, a Tai-speaking tribe, migrated into what is now north-east India. The historical records of their kings, the Borinjus, recount how the Ahom prince Sukhapa led his tribe through the Patkai Hills en route to modern-day Assam. They fought fierce battles with the Nagas, who had already settled in the hills, and many of the Ahom were killed.

Almost two millennia ago, around AD 150, the Greek scientist and scholar Claudius Ptolemy, in his *Geographia*, referred to the area north of modern-day Bangladesh as 'Nagaloï', meaning 'the realm of the naked'. Although it is true that the Naga people did go about unclothed, it is more likely that the primitive people described by Ptolemy are hardly related to today's Nagas. The name 'Naga' was given to these tribes by outsiders and just what it meant is open to much debate, with as many as a dozen different theories put forward by scholars.<sup>1</sup>

Linguists often hold the key to unlock uncertain histories of people groups. All the Naga languages are part of the Tibeto-Burman family, which consists of more than a thousand varieties spread from China, Tibet and Nepal to Vietnam and Laos in south-east Asia. The Nagas can be shown to be distant relatives of the eight million Yi people in southern China and the Akha of northern Thailand—now-fragmented groups that many centuries ago had more ethnic cohesion.

Undoubtedly, one of the main historical reasons for the disintegration of the Tibeto-Burman race into countless tribes was the invasion of south-west China by the Mongols in 1253. As their hordes advanced they slaughtered millions of people, often killing every living soul they came across. Many tribes and clans scattered to avoid certain death. Some hid in the mountains

until the immediate danger had passed, but others travelled vast distances in search of a new land beyond the reach of the Mongol Empire.

It is likely that the ancestors of the Naga people left southern China in the 13th century, migrating first into modern-day Myanmar and then on into the rugged mountains that came to be known as Nagaland. This timing places them in their present homeland just before the first record of their existence, when the unfortunate Ahoms attempted to pass through their territory. Wherever the first Nagas came from, there is no doubt they have been living almost exclusively in their current locations for many centuries. Their oral traditions go back at least 52 generations.

When Westerners first came into regular contact with the Nagas in the 1800s, they found a fearsome people who practised head-hunting and yet were also a people of strong character and convictions, whose society and culture offered much to admire. John Henry Hutton wrote:

Nagas have fine qualities. They are simple, humorous, courteous and hospitable. Nagas are people with a sense of humour and generosity at home, at work and at gatherings; laughter is the food of the society and hospitality is overwhelming. Nagas are honest and truthful people, stealing is not common . . . and they have respect for elders. . . . They are healthy, actively vigorous and brave people. The Nagas are well built and enthusiastically looking for a true God.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that most Nagas now find themselves living within the borders of India certainly doesn't mean they can in any way be associated historically, biologically, culturally, linguistically or ethnically with other Indian races. To this day, when a Naga needs to make a trip down onto the plains or to a large city such as Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), he will tell his friends and family that he needs to travel 'to India'. The implication is that the Nagas do not consider Nagaland to be part of India.

## 2

### Hunting for Heads

When the cock first crows, the Nagas rush with great shouting into the village and cut up everybody they meet with, sparing neither old infirm men nor helpless women nor children: even the cows, pigs and poultry of the foe are slaughtered. Sometimes the victors remain on the spot two or three days, but generally [they] return to their own village on the same day, taking with them the heads, hands and feet of those they have massacred: these they parade about from house to house, accompanied with drums and gongs, throwing liquor and rice on the heads and uttering all manner of incantations. . . . They then sing, dance and perform all manner of antics, pierce and mangle the heads of their enemies, and again with curses enjoin them to summon their whole race to suffer the same ignominious treatment.

John Butler, 1847

Head-hunting was practised by the Nagas for so many centuries that no one is quite sure how it began. It became such an intricate and essential part of their culture and identity that no account of these people could be complete without reference to it.

Many Westerners have wrongly assumed that head-hunting was merely a matter of violence and murder, but for the pre-Christian Nagas it was much more than that. To them, it was something noble to be admired, a proof of bravery and strength. The Naga historian Joseph Thong explains:

The practice of head-hunting and Feast of Merit are at the heart and soul of the Naga culture, around which the rest of the life activities are inter-woven. Establishment

of Village, the village gate, construction of house and its decorations, dress and ornaments, wood-carving, stone monuments, dyeing, tattooing, songs and dances, marriage, implements and tools, cultivation, chieftainship, clan system, beliefs, rituals and festivals etc revolve around and link up with head-hunting and Feast of Merit, which are basically the same in almost all the Naga tribes, except for some local and minor variations from tribe to tribe, village to village and clan to clan.<sup>3</sup>

The Nagas say they learned how to fight by watching ants raid each other's nests. In early times, one tribe or village waged war against another over land and other such subjects of dispute. When the war parties returned with stories of great victories and slaughters, some people remained unconvinced because they had only the word of the warriors for it. To substantiate their claims, the warriors therefore decided to bring home parts of their victims' bodies, such as their kneecaps. This practice gradually evolved into cutting off arms, but these proved too heavy to carry any great distance through the jungle.

Joseph Thong recounts:

One day, a warrior, while on his way to fight his enemies, saw two red ants fighting each other in the forest. As he watched the fight he saw one red ant had killed the other and severed its head, which was then carried into its hole. The warrior liked what he saw and started cutting off his victim's head whenever he made a kill. Others too started appreciating this idea, as carrying the head was handier. This was how the idea of beheading the dead victim started.<sup>4</sup>

When it came to head-hunting, gender and age did not matter. The only restrictions on a warrior were that he could not kill someone from the same clan or family, or anyone who was crippled or insane. Indeed, some Naga tribes accorded particular honour to warriors who returned with the heads of women and



children, because they were usually protected in the heart of the village by the opposing fighters and to have slain them meant that the warrior must have performed an exceptional feat of bravery.

One contemporary Naga has even defended the culture of head-hunting by comparing it favourably with modern-day warfare. He argues that head-hunting is practised

. . . all over the world. The so-called civilized countries wipe out the whole population of a certain area with chemical weapons and look down on another ethnic group for killing a few men with a simple tool and call it 'anarchism', whereas destroying millions of lives with chemical weapons is seen as a 'civilized, scientific and lawful act'.<sup>5</sup>

The same writer goes on to lament:

Although some British colonial administrators, American Christian missionaries, travellers, journalists, military personnel, Naga national workers, church organizations, local administrators, academicians and other writers have written books on the Nagas, so far no comprehensive book covering the various aspects of the culture of the Naga head-hunters has been produced to meet the needs of those who hunt for [heads].<sup>6</sup>

According to another Naga source, the motivation for head-hunting among the Konyak tribe was one of love—'love for God and brotherly love for man. The highest offering and sacrifice a man could offer God was human blood. On all important occasions human blood was to be shed. This was done as a token of their love and gratitude to God'.<sup>7</sup>

It should be remembered that these twisted sentiments were expressed decades before any part of the Bible was translated into the Naga languages, and a generation or two before the consciences of the Naga people were awakened by the Holy Spirit.

When the British gained control of Naga territory, their plans to put a stop to head-hunting met with limited success. For example, on Christmas Day, 1909, a British officer went to Tuensang intent on punishing those who had been involved in a recent head-hunting raid. He ordered the village chiefs to hand over the men in question, but they replied, 'Does a hunter give away his hounds?'

The officer, seeing he would not get what he came for, then demanded payment of a fine for head-hunting. This time the reply was: 'We have no coins. We hear the government makes coins. If they are short, let them make some more.'<sup>8</sup>

The practice of head-hunting only started to subside after the gospel took hold and Naga Christians learned of the value God places on human life. Joseph Thong notes:

The American Baptist missionaries played a vital role in bringing the head-hunting culture to an end, by convincing their converts that head-hunting is a sin and is against morality. God, the Creator of man and the universe, will punish those who murder their fellow men. Therefore, all who embraced Christianity automatically stopped head-hunting raids.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the last instances of head-hunting in Nagaland occurred during the Naga war with India. This led to some uncomfortable experiences for Naga Christians fighting alongside non-Christians who saw it as their duty to cut off their enemies' heads. On April 1, 1957, the Naga army triumphed in a battle at Dzüleikie:

Next came the gruesome task of beheading some of the dead bodies so that their heads could be taken to their camps, where the victory ceremonies and rituals would be performed. Many turned away from this gory act, as there were among them some Christians who never participated in such rituals. But for the non-Christian this taking of heads back to their camps was a necessary part of their mission to ensure future victory and guard

against disastrous results in other missions. As they walked away from the scene of the day's battle, they turned around and addressed the dead, declaring, 'Your sin has been your undoing. The guilt is not upon me.'<sup>10</sup>

As tens of thousands of Nagas came into relationship with Christ in the 1960s and '70s, the practice of head-hunting faded into the pages of history. Only in the remote jungles of Myanmar, where some Konyak Nagas live in extremely isolated villages, is it still rumoured to continue today.

## The First Christians

The late 18th century saw the beginning of the Protestant missionary enterprise. William Carey, later dubbed 'the father of modern missions,' arrived in India in 1793, and was followed by the now legendary figures of Robert Morrison, who went to China in 1807, and Adoniram Judson, who introduced the gospel to Burma in 1813. The Khasi tribe in Assam had the honour of being the first ethnic group in north-east India to hear the gospel, when Krishna Chandra Pal, a convert of William Carey, led two Khasis to Christ in 1812.

Major Francis Jenkins, then Commissioner-General of Assam, first suggested the idea of missionaries coming to the remote hills of north-east India. He found that the tribespeople of the area were 'not only a nuisance, but treacherous and tricky demon-worshippers as well. The only thing that will make them better is Christianity.'<sup>11</sup> The British Baptists thought better of his invitation and decided that it would be more convenient for the American Baptists to go, given that they were already in the process of establishing a work in neighbouring Burma.

The Americans readily responded. The Rev Nathan Brown and the Rev O T Cutter and their wives set out from Calcutta on November 20, 1835 and reached Sadiya in Assam on March 23, 1836, after a gruelling four-month journey of 800 miles up the River Brahmaputra. Cyrus and Rhoda Bronson arrived a year later and moved to Jaipur, on the edge of the Naga Hills. There they were joined by the Browns and Cutters in May 1839, when they abandoned Sadiya after the British Colonel Adam White and eight others had been brutally killed by Khampti tribesmen.



These pioneer missionaries were of tough stock. They had forsaken all to follow the Saviour, and no hardship could prevent them from accomplishing their task. Bronson wrote to the Board of Missions:

We want the choicest men the church has to consecrate; men well disciplined in mind—well versed in the study of human nature—of unflinching patience—possessing a zeal that difficulty will only enkindle; men who can press onward to the accomplishment of an object for years amid every sacrifice, and not faint; not self-willed, not high-minded, but ready to take any place appointed to them in the providence of God; above all, men of deep piety.<sup>12</sup>

Their strength of character was illustrated in the person of Edward Scott. When he visited the Makir tribe in Assam, the village chief and his warriors confronted him with spears and accused him of coming to steal their children and carry them away as slaves. With bulging eyes, they threatened the missionary with death if he advanced any further. Scott responded by calmly taking out his violin. With tears of joy, he sang the hymn

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would he devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I have done  
He groaned upon the tree?  
Amazing pity! grace unknown!  
And love beyond degree!

The warriors were both thrilled and amazed at the sound of the violin. Their threatening faces softened and no harm was done to Scott.

Although missionaries were labouring among other tribes in north-east India, the honour of being the first to bring the gospel

to the Nagas belongs to Cyrus and Rhoda Bronson, who made two exploratory trips into their territory in 1839. On March 13, 1840, they moved to the Naga Hills and began working at Namsang. Just a few months later, however, their entire family was afflicted with severe illness and they were obliged to abandon their station and move back to Jaipur. They never returned, and the work at Namsang ceased. The missionary enterprise among the Nagas withdrew to the plains, and a Christian presence in the Hills remained an unfulfilled dream for the next seven years.

In 1847, Major John Butler wrote the following negative evaluation of the missionaries' prospects among the Nagas:

The south-eastern hills of Assam are the abode of many tribes of Nagas. They are a very uncivilized race, with dark complexions, athletic sinewy frames, hideously wild and ugly visages: their faces and bodies being tattooed in a most frightful manner by pricking the juice of the bela nut into the skin in a variety of fantastic figures. They are reckless of human life; treacherously murdering their neighbours often without provocation, or at least for a trivial cause or offence. The greater number of Nagas are meant to be in a very destitute state, living almost without clothing of any kind. Their poverty renders them remarkably free from any prejudices in respect of diet: they will eat cows, dogs, cats, vermin, and even reptiles, and are very fond of intoxicating liquors.

Amongst a people so thoroughly primitive, and so independent of religious prepossessions, we might reasonably expect missionary zeal would be most successful; for the last eight years, however, two or three American Baptist missionaries have in vain endeavoured to awake in them a sense of the saving virtues of Christianity. . . . In 1839, the missionaries turned their attention more particularly towards the Nagas; they took up their residence on the Boree Dehing River, at Jetpore [Jaipur], established a school, and were indefatigable in

endeavouring to gain some correct knowledge of the savage tribes in their vicinity. A few years' experience here proved the futility of their plans. Instead of wandering amongst the savage tribes scattered over an immense extent of country, in unhealthy, dense jungles, it would have been prudent and politic to have afforded instruction in the first instance to the populous villages in the plains.<sup>13</sup>

The Baptist missionaries did indeed make contact with Nagas from time to time on the Assam plains. Hube, a Konyak Naga, is recorded to have been the very first Naga Christian. He was baptized on September 12, 1847, but died a few weeks later, on October 10.<sup>14</sup> The second was Longjanglepzuk, an Ao Naga from the village of Merangkong. The Rev Francis Wayland baptized him on September 7, 1851. About three years later, his village was attacked by Konyak head-hunters and he was killed in the raid.

In 1855, two more Konyak men were baptized, named Aklong and Amlai from the village of Namsamg. "These men returned to their village preaching the gospel of God. The leaders of the village thought that the new religious teaching would create confusion in the minds of the people and turn the village upside-down. Therefore, for the sake of "peace and order" they exterminated the two men."<sup>15</sup>

Satan was doing all he could to crush the seed of the gospel among the Nagas. The first four to become Christians were all dead within a short time of their conversion to Christ. In Scripture, we see that Satan often attempts to put a stop to God's planned deliverances before they have a chance to get under way. When Moses was born, Satan prevailed upon Pharaoh to command that all newborn Israelite boys should be thrown into the River Nile (Exodus 1:22). Similarly, when Jesus was born the jealous King Herod ordered the massacre of all boys in Bethlehem under the age of two (Matthew 2:16). But Satan's schemes were frustrated

on both these occasions, and his plan to strangle the Naga church in its infancy also turned out to be a dismal failure.

The Ao were the first of the Naga tribes to receive the gospel in significant numbers. In early 1871, an Ao man named Subongmeren from the village of Dekahaimong was making a trip to Sibsagar to trade when he came into contact with the missionary Dr E W Clark and an Assamese evangelist called Godhula. He believed on the Lord Jesus and was baptized.<sup>16</sup>

As Godhula listened to Subongmeren's stories about his community, a vision and desire grew in his heart to take the gospel to the rest of this man's tribe. As the missionary Dr S W Rivenburg wrote, he 'was a zealous man in the prime of his youth, yet he was willing to take the gospel to those wild barbarians whom Assamese generally disliked.'<sup>17</sup>

Clark had strictly warned Godhula never to go beyond the tea plantations that surrounded the mission compound in Sibsagar, because just beyond them lay the start of the Naga Hills, which he considered too dangerous to enter. But Godhula was convinced that God wanted him to take the gospel to the Nagas, so he disobeyed his employer. 'To go further meant a great risk. But [he] was ready for that risk and resolved to obey God rather than man.'<sup>18</sup>

The brave pioneer had already met and befriended a number of Nagas and they agreed to take him to their village, where he could meet the headman and request permission to stay. Two days later, they arrived at Dekahaimong. Godhula

... explained the purpose of his visit and proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ to the villagers. The village chiefs were not happy. They took him to be a British spy and imprisoned him for a few days. There he sung and prayed and the people began to come and stand around to listen to him. They became friendly and Godhula soon won the hearts of many. When he told them of his intention to return to Sibsagar, the people were sad. At



his departure, women and children wept. No less than forty men escorted him to Sibsagar, thus paying him a high honour. . . . Successful Christian ministry among the Nagas was thus inaugurated by Godhula, the Assamese evangelist.<sup>19</sup>

Godhula made several trips to Dekahaimong during the winter of 1871/72, and on November 8, 1872, he led a group of Nagas to Sibsagar to be baptized.

Nine men confessed their Christian experience before the church and Clark baptized them on November 11. They were registered as members of the Sibsagar Church for the time being, since there was no church in the Naga Hills, but then they returned to their village and built a chapel there. On December 18, Clark, Godhula and other members of the Sibsagar Church made a trip to Dekahaimong and five days later 15 men confessed their Christian faith and were baptized. This was the first baptismal service ever held in Nagaland and was the humble beginning of the Naga church. In December 1972, that church celebrated its centenary and commemorated that first baptism.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of inter-village tensions, on October 24, 1876 the Christians of Dekahaimong decided to start a new community on an uninhabited mountaintop about three miles to the west. They named the new village Molungyimsen. 'Here in all the ages was the first Naga village to hold Christ as King, all praise to his name.'<sup>21</sup>

Considerable ill feeling arose when this new, Christian village refused to sacrifice cattle during the great spirit festival of the Ao, and for this and other reasons the village headman at Dekahaimong decided to take action.

This meant a declaration of war. . . . Consequently a threat came from the old village to exterminate the new village and to take possession of the white man [E W Clark]'s head as well. The Christians replied that the new village very earnestly desired to live in peace and amity with

all others. They said, 'We are accepted disciples of the Almighty God, who made the earth and all in it, and who cares for his children.' They added, 'We trust in him and we beg that you be his friends and not foes.' Most earnest was the prayers. A peaceful message came. Christians praised the Lord.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to imagine the courageous faith demanded of Clark, Godhula and the other Christian pioneers who first ventured into Naga territory with the gospel. The threat of decapitation was not an idle one. Beheading was frequent. As M M Clark wrote,

Those were the days when people from other countries were afraid to go to the Naga Hills, because doing so could mean death and mutilation. . . . When Rev. Clark had gone to the Naga Hills, leaving his wife at Sibsagar, one British officer . . . asked Mrs. Clark, 'Have you heard from Mr. Clark? Do you ever expect to see your husband back with his head on his shoulders?'<sup>23</sup>

Satan did not gladly accept the introduction of Christianity to the hills that had been his unchallenged domain for centuries. Life for the small Naga Christian community was difficult. In 1887, the Rev Sidney Rivenburg reported, 'During the year we passed through much by which our lives were jeopardized; but through all God was better than our foolish ways. It has been a long time of severe trial to our church members. The horrors of savage warfare at our door required all the fortitude we all possessed to remain at our posts.'<sup>24</sup>

The missionaries were not merely tough Christians. Their courage stemmed from a deep love—first for Jesus Christ and second for the people they had come to reach. Note the longing expressed in this 1891 letter from Rivenburg:

It has been my daily practice to go into the Naga village, and give out medicine to the sick, and preach to whomsoever would listen. My throat is not all right, and

from one to two hours talking has been about the limit of daily preaching. Hundreds have listened, and many with apparent interest. About two weeks ago I had the first sign. After having talked very earnestly for a long time to a company of very sober, interested listeners, one man said very solemnly, 'We will keep it.' How much the truth had really taken hold of his heart, I do not know. But this I know: in the four long years I have not heard as much from heathen lips before. I long to see some souls saved. The lack of converts greatly depresses me.<sup>25</sup>

And so, through the brave efforts of a few sanctified men and women, the fire of the gospel was lit in Nagaland. At first, it was a mere flicker that looked ready to be snuffed out. Decades of laborious effort had produced meagre results: by 1911, after 71 years of missionary work, the number of Naga Christians totalled just 1,128. But over the years the fire burned brighter and brighter, clearing the ground for the incredible events that were to follow generations later.

## The Gospel Takes Root

In Nagaland today live 13 distinct tribes of Naga people.<sup>26</sup> They are differentiated from each other by language, dress and customs, yet they are also bound together by a common history and a broad ethnic identity.

In this chapter, we briefly study how the gospel first took hold among each tribe, preparing the way for the powerful revivals that followed in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. We examine each tribe in chronological order of its Christianization, from the Ao, amongst whom the first Naga church was established in 1872, all the way down to the Yimchung, who saw their first convert to Christ baptized a full eighty years later.

### The Ao Nagas

The Ao are the most populous tribe in Nagaland today, numbering approximately 150,000. As recounted in the previous chapter, this was the first Naga tribe to experience a significant turning to Christ. The church grew slowly but steadily, until in 1885 the pioneer missionary E W Clark reported that a revival had begun at Molung. It was still continuing four years later. In 1898 alone, 104 Ao were baptized. Converts were added to the church every year into the early 1900s, largely because of the Christian schools that the missionaries had established. By 1905, the church had 685 members.

In 1913, the awakening gathered momentum as lay preachers travelled to every Ao village and preached the salvation of Christ. By 1920, there were 46 Ao churches, with 3,838 members. The Ao sent missionaries to neighbouring tribes such as the Lotha,



Sumi, Chang and Konyak, and great things happened as Christ conquered the hearts of thousands and the grip of sin and violence began to loosen. By 1930, the Ao church was self-supporting. Altogether, there were 9,000 Christians, of whom 7,000 had full church membership.

The advance of the Kingdom of God among the Ao was now poised for the phenomenal revival of the 1950s. It is remarkable to think that the Ao church had begun only because a faithful Christian named Godhula had chosen to disobey the orders of his missionary employers and ventured into the Naga Hills with the message of salvation.

## **The Lotha Nagas**

The Lotha Nagas today number around 80,000 people in west central Nagaland, around the town of Wokha.

The good news of Jesus Christ first arrived among them through the influence of Christian schools and Sunday schools established by the American Baptist missionaries. Initial attempts to reach the Lotha were not very encouraging at all. The first conversion occurred in the 1880s, but most people proved extremely resistant to efforts to evangelize them.

The strategy of reaching people through Christian education—which later proved successful among other Naga tribes—at first did not work with the Lotha. On September 18, 1886, the missionary W E Witter wrote:

The school problem is most perplexing. To get these savages to attend school, we must at least give them their rice; for the parents have as yet no desire that their children be taught to read and write, and would as soon throw their rice in the fire as send it to the station for the support of a boy in school.<sup>27</sup>

On one occasion, Witter told the Lotha students that if they studied diligently they might be able to further their studies in

another country when they were older. Many parents promptly withdrew their children from the school, afraid that they would never see them again.

However, although there was little to show for the first 20 years of evangelism, good seed was being sown for a large harvest in years to come. What began as a trickle of converts soon became a steady flow, and then a powerful stream. Even the beleaguered Christian schools started to produce results. In 1904, the missionaries reported:

The Lotha work is perhaps the most encouraging part of the work. Boys have been drawn from every part of that tribe for the training school. Good numbers have become Christians. The past year a fairly strong church has been built up at Okotso village.<sup>28</sup>

The 1920s saw the Lotha church well and truly established. In 1921, it had only 149 members, but two evangelists named Ibansao and Chichamo boldly proclaimed the gospel to their fellow tribesmen and within just one year its membership increased to 257. Throughout the decade, more than a hundred baptisms were recorded every year. In 1929, Ibansao baptized 168 converts, bringing the total membership to 758. And within another seven years the church had more than doubled to 1,789 baptized believers meeting in 37 congregations.<sup>29</sup>

The numbers rose every year, and by 1946 the Christian community had increased to over half of the total population. The translation and printing of the Lotha New Testament in 1944 contributed greatly to the numerical and spiritual growth of the church, as hungry believers read God's word in their own language for the first time.

The Lotha church had come a long way since 1886, when Witter had lamented, 'To get these savages to attend school, we must at least give them their rice.'

## The Angami Nagas

Today, more than 90,000 Angami Nagas live in western Nagaland and parts of the Indian state of Manipur.

While the gospel had started to take root among the Ao and other Naga tribes in the late 1800s, the Angami near Kohima (the capital of Nagaland) proved stony ground for the Christian message. C D King and his wife, Anna, were the first missionaries appointed to reach them, in 1879. It was later reported:

The response of the Angami was not like that of the Ao or any other tribes in Nagaland. It was slow. Angami seemed to be more resistant to change, whether political, social or religious. Samaguting was the first Angami village to host the Kings but it was the last to receive Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The first Angami Christian was a man named Sieliezhü, who was baptized on June 21, 1885. By 1906, the total number of Christians in this tribe was just 35.

The following years saw church membership fluctuate as a number of people backslid. The missionaries had their hands full dealing with problems of church discipline. Of C D King's first four converts, one was excommunicated for worshipping spirits and another for adultery. In 1910, the Angami church had 90 members. In 1914, it had 151, in 1918 248—then back down to 212 in 1920.<sup>31</sup>

However, the arrival of the missionaries Mr and Mrs George Supplee in 1922 greatly strengthened the work in Kohima. In the following year, church membership doubled. Within five years, the Angami New Testament was completed, and in that same year, 1927, 455 people were converted to Christ and baptized. The Angami church had taken root and was slowly gaining in strength. By 1937, church membership in the Kohima area had grown by 1,736—of whom 630 were Angami.<sup>32</sup>

## **The Chakhesang Nagas**

There are several distinct phases in the story of how God reached the Chakhesang Nagas. The name 'Chakhesang' is actually a condensation of the names of three allied tribes: the Chakrü, the Khezha and the Sangtam. Together these three sub-tribes total about 85,000 people in eastern and south-eastern Nagaland. Most numerous are the Sangtams (40,000), followed by the Khezhas (24,000) and the Chakrüs (21,000).

The gospel was first preached to the Chakhesang by Sidney Rivenburg in 1895. He and his wife, Hattie, had arrived in India in 1883 and they enjoyed a long and fruitful career as missionaries until 1923.<sup>33</sup>

After Sidney Rivenburg and two Naga evangelists named Sieliezhü and Kruneizhü first went to Chakhesang territory in 1895, a small congregation emerged in the village of Chazuba, about 40 miles east of Kohima. Many decades later, a 97-year-old man named Pushoyi recalled that first visit:

Rivenburg requested the villagers to set up a thatched tabernacle for a gathering. They collected jungle materials and completed the tabernacle immediately. The meeting hall was attached to the house of Tazüho, the village chief. Rivenburg called a meeting and many people turned up. He preached about 'God the Creator' and 'a sure place of rest after death'. The preaching was translated by Kruneizhü. Sieliezhü was singing most of the time. People were listening to the message with great interest. They were there with their rice-beer cups in their hands in the manner of their traditional social gatherings. On the same day, ten persons accepted the Christian faith. There was no opposition or reaction. But later on, due to social pressure, seven out of the ten persons reverted to their former faith. The remaining three persons became the initial pillars and the Church began to grow with them.<sup>34</sup>



One factor that contributed to this immediate initial success seems to have been some prophecies uttered several hundred years before by a Chakhesang seer named Khamhimütülü. One church leader noted: 'She prophesied many future events, and her sayings are coming true. Her teachings are found to coincide with those of the Bible.'<sup>35</sup>

All the same, new converts faced strong opposition from their fellow tribesmen, who equated acceptance of Christianity with a betrayal of Chakhesang culture and history. Nonetheless, many of the believers stood firm in their faith and some—notably, three men named Sülüho, Lhüprüve and Sare—faithfully shared the gospel.

## **The Kuki Nagas**

The Kuki Nagas today number more than 150,000 people spread across five states of north-east India. Approximately 80,000 live in Nagaland, and a further 26,200 inhabit neighbouring areas of Myanmar. Linguistically, the Kuki are rather distinct from other Naga tribes, with a language more closely related to the Chin languages of Myanmar than to other Naga varieties.

The gospel was first proclaimed among the Kuki in 1897, and it was commonly believed that the first baptism took place in 1908. However, when a stone inscription commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Kuki Baptist Association in Nagaland was unveiled, it stated: 'The late Mr. Ngulhao Thomsong was the first to be converted to Christianity in 1897.' Ngulhao was an early convert who left for Manipur, where he spent the rest of his life preaching and translating the Scriptures. Consequently, because he was not seen in Nagaland after his conversion, he was not widely recognized as the first Kuki Christian.

The first Kuki congregation was established at Sirhima on February 7, 1912. The church remained small and ineffective until an awakening in 1916 that resulted in the transformation of dozens of lives and a consequent expansion in church

membership. Seventy-six people were baptized that year. 'With this, the non-Christian opposition was heightened to a great extent. They wanted to kill the Christians of the village. When Christians could no longer bear the threat and persecution they built a new village at Chalkot.'<sup>36</sup>

In 1936, there were still only 200 Kuki Christians in Nagaland. By 1950, this number had grown to 700, in 29 churches.

## **The Zeliangrong Nagas**

'Zeliangrong' is a condensation of the names of three related tribes: the Zemes, the Liangmais and the Rongmeis. Together they number approximately 30,000 people, of whom most live in Nagaland but some inhabit communities in the Indian states of Manipur and Assam.

Christianity first came to the Zeliangrong Nagas when Angami evangelists visited them in the early 1900s. Three students of the Kohima Mission Training School were baptized on December 31, 1905, and among them was the headman of a Zeliangrong village, who is believed to have been the first Christian from his tribe.<sup>37</sup> For years, however, the Zeliangrong were resistant to the gospel and threatened those who tried to bring it to them.

By 1951, almost half a century after the light of the gospel first shone in their midst, the Zeliangrong church numbered a mere 80. In that same year, H K Lungalang, a Zeliangrong, resigned from his government job to dedicate his energies to preaching the gospel among his fellow tribesmen. In 1953, the Zeliangrong Baptists formed their own association and a spurt of growth occurred. By the end of 1955, there were 21 congregations, with 637 baptized Christians. By 1959, church membership stood at over a thousand.

## The Sumi Nagas

The Sumi (or Sema) Nagas are one of the largest of the 13 tribes. Today, they number some 140,000 people, inhabiting parts of central and southern Nagaland.

The gospel first reached them in the early 1900s, when evangelists from the Ao, Angami and Lotha took the responsibility to reach out to their neighbours. The first Sumi Christian is reputed to have been a man named Ivilho of the village of Ghokimi, who was baptized in 1906. Ivilho and another Sumi named Jekique proved to be powerful evangelists, enduring great hardship for the gospel. One historian notes that, 'despite resistance, threats, persecution, and fines imposed on them, the Sumi were coming forth as professed Christians from different villages.'<sup>38</sup>

In the early years of the Sumi church, an entire village converted to Christ after an undeniable miracle occurred. A Sumi woman had been seriously ill for some time and was knocking on death's door.

All their tribal efforts failed to heal her. Finally she was left to the Christians' God. It was their decision that, if she became well by praying to the God of the Christians, the whole village would become Christian. God answered the prayer. The woman was healed. This decisive event itself persuaded the whole village to profess Christianity as the true religion.<sup>39</sup>

This mass conversion brought extreme persecution from non-Christians in the surrounding areas, but the believers would not be swayed from their new convictions. As one writer later observed: 'Without the work of a missionary or the preaching of a native evangelist, [Sumi] people became Christians and organized themselves into churches.'<sup>40</sup>

By 1929, the total number of Sumi church members was 3,000. That same year, a dramatic conversion took place. A man named Inaho, who was a translator at the Mokokchung Court, had been

a powerful enemy of Christ and a persecutor of Christians. When his father fell seriously ill, 'it was a time for Inaho to think. Christ spoke to him and he realized that there was no salvation outside Christ. He left his government job and entered into the ministry as an evangelist.'<sup>41</sup>

By 1936, there were 6,500 Sumi Christians. Just three years later, in 1939, the Baptists recorded 78 Sumi churches, with 8,000 members. A decade later, that number had swollen to 16,000 baptized believers in 150 congregations. However, despite these impressive figures, all was not well in the Sumi church. As one report lamented:

Spirit worship, polygamy, drinking of rice beer and other evils threatened and undermined the good work for Christ. In 1951, 115 persons were expelled and 145 Christians reverted. Yet the number of the churches increased to 222 and the membership to 16,422.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Rengma Nagas**

The Rengma number approximately 22,000 people today, located in central and western areas of Nagaland. They are the least numerous of the 13 Naga tribes.

The gospel first made an impact among the Rengma in 1918. The first convert was a spirit priest (or 'witchdoctor') named Phenuga Kemp. Kemp had been zealous for his ancient pagan religion, but after his first two daughters died he became sceptical about its efficacy and started searching for the truth. At that time he was informed that an Angami evangelist named Sieliezhü was preaching a new religion about a Supreme God who was more powerful than any demon. Kemp was so convinced of the truth of the gospel that he abandoned his spirit worship, destroyed the tools of his trade and wholeheartedly followed Jesus Christ.

The gospel was generally viewed with deep suspicion until 1922–23, when a large number of people were converted and



baptized. By 1937, there were 350 Rengma Christians. The very next year, a further 114 were baptized. The church continued to grow steadily, albeit less spectacularly, among this tribe.

In 1950, the Rengma church had 1,300 members meeting in 13 congregations. Today, around 90 per cent of all Rengma are believers. When Phenuga Kemp, the witchdoctor, became the first Rengma Christian in 1918, nobody could have guessed that God would do such a tremendous work among this precious tribe.

## **The Konyak Nagas**

The Konyak are one of the most easily recognizable Naga tribes. Their appearance is striking, with the men decorating their heads with huge tusks from wild boars. More than 120,000 Konyak are located in eastern Nagaland and a similar number spill across the border into western Myanmar. These combined populations make the Konyak the largest Naga tribe.

They also were the last of the Nagas to abandon head-hunting (though it is rumoured that isolated instances still take place in remote villages in Myanmar), and the last to experience the power of God's revival. It is somewhat ironic that (as recorded in the previous chapter) this tribe can also lay claim to the honour of the first known Naga Christian, the man named Hube who was baptized in 1847 but died less than a month later.<sup>43</sup>

For almost a century after that, the gospel struggled to make any inroads among the Konyak as the tribe gradually slipped into moral and spiritual decline. The growth of the church was painfully slow and fraught with difficulty. By 1940, its total membership in Nagaland was only 145. However, new programmes were launched by other Naga Christians to evangelize the Konyak and by the end of 1949 that figure had increased to 1,600.

When the Naga missionary Longri Ao first visited the Konyak in the village of Wakching in 1950, he reported:

You should see the people . . . there is much sickness, they have no education. They are always afraid, even of each

baptized. By 1937, there were 350 Rengma Christians. The very next year, a further 114 were baptized. The church continued to grow steadily, albeit less spectacularly, among this tribe.

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However, God's plans were in no way hindered by such opposition and revival broke out in many places. Just a few months after the burning of the bell, more than 70 of the Konyak who had taken part in the raid on the church accepted Christ.

## **The Phom Nagas**

Inhabiting many villages in north-eastern Nagaland around the town of Tuensang, the Phom Nagas today number roughly 35,000.

An Ao evangelist named Kijungluba is widely recognized as the earthen vessel God chose to first take the gospel to this tribe. The first Phom Christian was Imkum, of the village of Kaching, who was baptized in 1936. His son Mengkham went to Impur to receive Bible training and subsequently returned as the first Phom evangelist to his people.

Unlike their counterparts in most of the other tribes, the Phom Christians did not meet with much persecution. The new believers were able to continue to live in their villages and interact with other members of their families. As a result, the gospel spread and gradually more souls were gathered into the Kingdom of God. In 1943, the missionary C E Hunter wrote:

Christ has claimed his first converts across the border. Only a few villages, but villages are large, some of them having about 600 houses. Ten people were baptized from one of these villages. . . . Head-hunting continued until a few years ago between this and a neighbouring village. The converts live among the wild people.<sup>47</sup>

By 1952, the Phom church had grown to 1,166 baptized members meeting in 12 congregations—though grounding the new believers in the word of God was difficult, as only 46 of them were literate at the time.

## **The Chang Nagas**

More than 31,000 members of the Chang tribe live in parts of east central Nagaland, especially in Tuensang District, with further communities located in the Indian state of Assam.

The gospel was first preached to the Chang in the early 1900s, with little success. Their close-knit communities refused to allow any evangelists to visit them. They built a spiritual wall around themselves and were determined that it should not be penetrated. After the word of God reached the Ao village of Akhoia in 1906, it was hoped that the Ao would soon spread it to the Chang village of Yaongyimti just a short distance away, but the tribe's stubborn resistance meant that it was more than 30 years before the first of them believed.

The establishment of God's church among the Chang was greatly assisted by the ministry of an Ao evangelist, Onen Lepten Ao. A Chang man named Loyim was converted on September 5, 1937. He dared to go against his own culture in order to be counted as a child of God. Others soon followed. Persecution of the new believers was extreme. The Naga historian Phuveyi Dozo commented, "The Chang are a warlike tribe. For years they were deadly against the gospel. Persecution of the few who became Christians was extreme—to the extent of killing the Christians."<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, a church was built at Yaongyimti in 1940 to accommodate 50 worshippers. A key Chang leader named Imlong was enthusiastic in preaching the gospel to his fellow tribesmen, and he also translated the Gospel of Mark into their language in 1946. Four years later, the fire of the gospel started to spread among the Chang. By 1952, there were 21 churches with 1,573 members. By 1955, there were 2,915 baptized Christians, and by 1967 4,667, in 37 churches.

This small tribe, who had declared themselves enemies of the gospel, were finally conquered by the love of Christ. The sounds of praise and worship can today be heard in villages that once killed Christians.



## **The Khamngan Nagas**

Twenty-five thousand Khamngan (or Khamniungan) Nagas inhabit the eastern part of Tuensang District in Nagaland. Other communities are located across the border in Myanmar. This is perhaps the most inaccessible of all the tribes in Nagaland. Visiting their villages can mean several days' walk over high mountains and through deep valleys.

The practice of head-hunting exerted a powerful influence over the Khamngan for much longer than most of the other Naga tribes. Consequently, the seed of the gospel only started to germinate among them in 1950, when a graduate of the Jorhat Bible School called Jongpong Wati went to live in the region. He learned the Khamngan language and found the people eager to listen to the gospel. Soon the first of them put their trust in Jesus. The historian Puthuvail Philip recorded:

The grace and mercy of God was shown to this people. They began to realize that their way of life was not the only way. Many began to confess Christ. In 1952, five churches were established. Their membership at the time was 410 persons. Only one church had a pastor. Membership rose to 538 and seventeen churches had been organized at the end of the year 1955. . . . The church grew from strength to strength each year as more villages and more people were won for Christ. The active Christian work continued and other tribal churches extended their help through prayer, personnel and financial support for the expansion of the church in that part of Nagaland.<sup>49</sup>

By 1967, the Khamngan church numbered more than 5,000 members, among them many former head-hunters who had found God's abundant pardon at the foot of the Cross.

Jongpong Wati in 1950 was the first to take the gospel to the Khamngan. He courageously walked alone into a tribe notorious

for cutting off human heads, because he knew that God loved this tribe and desired them to be his children. Today, these people have been completely transformed. The hills and valleys that once were filled with sounds of grief and despair after head-hunting raids are now full of voices praising Jesus Christ.

## **The Yimchung Nagas**

The Yimchung Nagas (also known as Yimchungrü) are also among the most remote and inaccessible of the tribes. There are still many tigers and bears roaming the rugged area where they live, and in consequence the gospel reached them much later than many other Naga groups. Hopong, a Yimchung pastor, told me:

It is strange that some people ask us if our communities are becoming Westernized, because very few of our people have ever seen a Westerner before. Very, very few have ever ventured into our part of Nagaland. In fact, our Yimchung people do not even understand how a human being could be white. It doesn't make sense to them and they think we are joking when we say we have seen white people!<sup>50</sup>

Today, there are some 35,000 Yimchung inhabiting 78 villages in northern Nagaland.

Sincere Ao and Sumi evangelists risked their lives to take the gospel to the Yimchung in 1950, at a time when head-hunting was rife among this tribe. In 1952, the first convert, a man named Mongo, received baptism, and several others followed soon after. As soon as Mongo's baptism took place,

. . . the non-Christians became antagonistic. They compelled Mongo and the other Christians in the village either to leave or deny Christ. Some left the village; others denied Christ. Mongo reaffirmed his faith in Christ. . . . He, his wife and his children were all slain for their disobedience. It was not in vain. Later the villagers

were impressed by the cause for which Mongo stood. They found something extraordinary in the behaviour of Mongo and his family and after-thoughts led many to Christ.<sup>51</sup>

By 1958, the membership of the Yimchung church totalled 500. Rapid growth thereafter meant that by the end of 1960 there were 1,056 baptized believers, an increase of over 100 per cent in just two years.

Through decades of toil and perseverance, the seed of the gospel had finally begun to take root among all the tribes in Nagaland.

## Betrayed by the British

The 19th century witnessed the expansion of colonial power throughout the world. The British came and administered Nagaland for 66 years,<sup>52</sup> making Kohima their regional headquarters in 1878. The annexation of the rest of Nagaland was a gradual process. However, although Nagaland was included in maps of the Empire as a conquered territory, 'it is correct to say that the British never had any absolute control of the Nagas. Inter-village feuds and head-hunting continued as before. . . . To a great extent the British left the Nagas to themselves.'<sup>53</sup> The British felt that the imposition of law and order on Nagaland would be too much trouble and expense. For their part, the Nagas were glad to be left alone. As long as the presence of the foreigners did not encroach on their freedom and dignity, they were content—though they also came to appreciate many of the social benefits the British brought to their communities.

In 1944, many Nagas fought alongside the British and Indians in the crucial Battle of Kohima, which finally stopped the Japanese in their tracks and thwarted their plans to invade and colonize India. Few Westerners have ever heard of this battle, yet it ranks alongside Midway, El Alamein and Stalingrad as one of the turning-points of the Second World War. Indeed, Lord Mountbatten described it as 'one of the greatest battles in history.'<sup>54</sup> The British Field Marshal Sir William Slim lauded the Naga contribution:

There were gallant Nagas whose loyalty even in the most depressing times of the invasion has never faltered. Despite floggings, torture, execution and the burning



of their villages, they refused to aid the Japanese in any way or to betray our troops. Their active help to us was beyond the value of praise. Under the leadership of devoted British political officers they guided our columns, collected information, ambushed enemy patrols, carried our supplies, and brought in our wounded under the heaviest fire—and then, being the gentlemen they were, often refused all payment. Many a British and Indian soldier owes his life to the naked, head-hunting Naga, and no soldier of the Fourteenth Army who met them will ever think of them but with admiration and affection.<sup>55</sup>

The Nagas' struggle for independence began in earnest in 1929, when a written memorandum from the Naga Club was submitted to the Simon Commission. The 20 tribal leaders who were signatories to this document were deeply concerned to learn that their territory had been included in the Reform Scheme of India, a British initiative launched without any consultation with the Nagas.

In part, the memorandum stated:

Though our land at present is within the British territory, [the British] Government has always recognized our private rights in it, but if we are forced to enter the council of the majority all these rights may be extinguished by unsympathetic council. . . . If the British Government, however, wants to throw us away, we pray that we should not be thrust to the mercy of the [Indians,] who could never have conquered us themselves, and to who we are never subjected, but leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times.

No firm decision was made by the British, despite repeated declarations of independence and autonomy by the Nagas. With growing dissatisfaction with colonial rule spreading all across India, they were far too busy to deal with the Nagas' claims.

After the war, it became clear that British rule in India was drawing to a conclusion. This worried the Nagas, who feared that they could be betrayed and forgotten by their British friends. In 1947, they issued another memorandum, addressed to the departing British as well as the incoming Indian government. In it, they asked for the setting up of 'an Interim government for a period of ten years, at the end of which the Naga people will be left to choose any form of Government under which they will live.'

This and other urgent letters were sent to senior British politicians, including Sir Winston Churchill, who they hoped would come to their aid. Part of a letter sent to the House of Lords read:

No argument is needed to show the Nagas are a separate people with their own customs, traditions and culture; and to say that the British Government has decided to hand over to Indian hands complete authority for governing of even Nagaland, in complete inconsistency with the policy of administration hitherto followed in the hills and in violation of implied but clear pledges during the past years, without even asking the opinion of the Nagas, is not only unjust but immoral.<sup>56</sup>

But the British continued to pay little attention to the Nagas, who had willingly spilled their blood to help repel the Japanese just a few years earlier.

Britain then proposed a scheme whereby the Nagas would join other tribal peoples of north-east India and Burma to form a territory that would continue under British rule even after the rest of India had gained its independence. This suggestion was rejected by the Nagas, who demanded complete sovereignty and self-determination. They did not want the option of continuing for a further 50 or 100 years under foreign dominion. Quite simply, they saw no possibility of compromise. They had always been free and they wanted to continue to be free. A firm line was drawn

in the sand—but they were demanding something the Indians would not give them and the British seemed unwilling to.

On July 9, 1947, a delegation of nine Naga leaders travelled to New Delhi to meet Mahatma Gandhi. They stated their case for independence and made it clear that they would rather die than join the Indian Union. According to Naga sources, Gandhi assured them that they had every right to be independent if they wanted to be. One report said:

When the Naga delegates pointed out that the Assam Governor, Sir Akbar Hydari, had threatened to use force against the Nagas in case they refused to join the Indian Union, Gandhi exclaimed, 'Sir Akbar is wrong. He cannot do that. . . . I will come to the Naga Hills; I will ask them to shoot me first before one Naga is shot.'<sup>57</sup>

Soon after this meeting, Gandhi was assassinated and the future of Nagaland began to look much bleaker.

Gandhi's successor, Jawaharlal Nehru, received numerous letters and delegations from Nagaland in the years after Indian independence, but all petitions fell on deaf ears. A referendum was held in Nagaland in which 99.9 per cent of the Naga people rejected the Indian constitution and demanded complete independence from Indian rule. The Nagas went ahead and declared independence, raising their own flag above their towns and villages. For a while, India seemed preoccupied with other matters and made no move against them.

When the Naga delegation visited Nehru in Delhi on March 11, 1952, they again stated their independence and told him of the results of the referendum. Nehru reportedly

. . . exploded with anger, and banging his fists on the table he said, 'Whether heaven falls or India goes to pieces and blood runs red in the country, I don't care. Whether I am here or for that matter any other body comes in, I don't care. Nagas will not be allowed to become independent!'<sup>58</sup>

in the sand—but they were demanding something the Indians would not give them and the British seemed unwilling to.

On July 9, 1947, a delegation of nine Naga leaders travelled to New Delhi to meet Mahatma Gandhi. They stated their case for independence and made it clear that they would rather die than join the Indian Union. According to Naga sources, Gandhi assured them that they had every right to be independent if they wanted to be. One report said:

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## 1955: Hell Comes to Nagaland

To the church, a revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness. . . . It is not the easy and glorious thing many think it to be. . . . It comes to scorch before it heals; it comes to condemn ministers and people for their unfaithful witness, for their selfish living, for their neglect of the Cross. . . . That is why a revival has ever been unpopular with large numbers within the church.

James Burns

These days, whenever armed conflict erupts in the world it is broadcast within hours via satellite television networks such as CNN or the BBC. Fifty years ago, when hell came to Nagaland, the Nagas were afforded no such exposure. A brutal war began in earnest in 1955 between the massive forces of the Indian Army and the Nagas: a war that few outsiders knew about, because it took place in the remote and isolated Naga Hills, with no reporters present. This war has continued for half a century, interrupted by occasional ceasefires.

The Naga Christians did not ask for a war with India, and they did not want to be involved in the taking of human life. Yet many felt they were compelled to fight in self-defence against the incredible onslaught they faced. As you read this chapter you may come to understand that the intention of the Indian government was nothing short of the complete annihilation of the Naga people. Its troops did not come to make or keep peace, or even to force a surrender. They came to pillage, rape and massacre as many Nagas as possible—soldiers or civilians, male or female, elderly or infants, it didn't matter.

Some of the most brutal conflicts in history have been triggered by some cultural offence, and this is true of the war between India and the Nagas. The Indian government announced that the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, would visit Kohima on March 30, 1953. The Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, would also be present, at a meeting where the future of Nagaland was to be discussed. The Nagas welcomed the presence of the two premiers, hoping that one last effort could be made to achieve the complete independence they desired.

On the appointed morning, about 15,000 Nagas assembled in Kohima to give a warm welcome to the two prime ministers. Just 10 minutes before the meeting was due to begin, however, the Indian side announced that no written or spoken submission from the Nagas would be allowed, and no questions could be asked.

In Naga culture, such a demand seemed grievous and disgraceful. One Naga writer explains:

To be told that a . . . guest would not talk to his hosts was simply unbelievable to the Nagas. As a result, the hosts as one man rose and walked out of the public meeting place—the outdoor stadium at Kohima. Nehru and U Nu were left to address only a handful of Government servants.

This was a most humiliating experience for Nehru, who had never ever experienced anything like this in his whole public life. Immediately following this incident, arrest warrants were issued against eight Naga leaders. . . . Following the raids on houses of Naga leaders, many went into hiding. The Assam police and paramilitary forces began to arrest many people at random. Properties of leaders were confiscated and auctioned, crops in the fields were destroyed and wives and children of several leaders were arrested and detained in jails.

There were also unfounded charges that American missionaries were behind the movement, and all

American Baptist missionaries were driven away from Nagaland. . . . Things began to move at a very fast pace.<sup>59</sup>

During 1954, the Indian hatred of the Nagas intensified to such a degree that full-scale war became inevitable. The Indians, mostly Hindus, considered the tribespeople the worst kind of scum, not worthy of their attention. The caste system that is responsible for many of the social ills prevalent in India categorizes tribal people as lower than animals. For the Nagas to show such stubborn insolence to the face of the Indian government for so long was more than India could take. When the cauldron boiled over, the result was of such a demonic savagery that only Satan himself and the hosts of hell could have conjured up the fury that was vented on the Nagas.

On March 31, 1955, the Naga National Council sent the following telegraph to the United Nations:

Reports reaching Kohima say that more than ten thousand men, women and children of Free Nagas are believed to have been already killed by the Indian troops within the last few days of wholesale massacre. People are being butchered systematically from village to village in Free Nagaland. We urgently appeal to you in the name of humanity to intervene and stop the killings.

The UN failed to respond.

The Naga people, proud and free, had been betrayed by the British they had so loyally served and were now forsaken by the rest of the world. They were left to face the military might of India alone.

Six months after the NNC's telegraph reached the UN, the Indian Army moved into Nagaland officially with two divisions, and 'the horror and nightmare of Nagaland multiplied a hundredfold.'<sup>60</sup> Thousands of people were slaughtered like helpless animals. It made no difference whether the victims were combatants or civilians, men, women, children or babies.

Such distinctions meant nothing to the Indian soldiers. Their enemy was anyone unfortunate enough to be born a Naga. What occurred was what, much later, was to become euphemistically known as 'ethnic cleansing.' The Indians seemed determined to erase the Naga people from the face of the earth.

The woeful experiences of the Nagas are too many to document and too horrible to read. I hope it will suffice to relate a few brief stories here, of a handful of Nagas among the thousands killed by Indian troops in the first year of their occupation . . .

On June 6, 1956, Mr Solomon, a member of the Ao Naga Church Council, and Deacon Imtilepzuk were tied to posts along with four other Christians in the village of Longpha and publicly executed by firing squad.

Six days later, Mr Pelhousielie of Kohima was captured by Indian soldiers. 'Without killing him, they cut open his abdomen and scooped out his viscerals; thus their prisoner was able to die slowly in tormenting agony.'<sup>61</sup>

On the same day, army officers billeted in the Kohima High School kidnapped two young girls, Pfuahunuo, aged 13, and Khunuo, aged 14. They were gang-raped by the regiment for hours, with all the officers venting their lust on the young Naga girls' bodies.

The Naga journalist and historian Kaka Iralu sums up this black period of his people's history:

In the subsequent orgy of violence that engulfed these beautiful mountains and hills, a hundred thousand cries of agony rent the air and reverberated across the valleys and mountains of Nagaland, but their cries were never heard except by their tormentors. They bled, they cried and they died but the world never heard their cries of agony. Every Naga soul felt the repercussions of this nightmare. Every Naga family was desecrated and almost every village of every tribe was burned to ashes.<sup>62</sup>





# FROM HEAD-HUNTERS TO CHURCH PLANTERS

There is a tendency today to associate "revival" and miracles with charismatic churches, but there were none of those in Nagaland when God first brought revival there. These powerful and life-changing visitations came to orderly, conservative Baptist congregations. As a result, Nagas found their true dignity not in themselves, their ethnic roots, their head-hunting, or the defense of their homeland, but they discovered it in the person and life of Jesus Christ, the living and one true God. This is a moving story of bravery and betrayal, suffering, persecution, supernatural intervention, and subsequent human weakness.

*"I recommend From Head-Hunters to Church Planters as an accurate and incisive account of what God has done among the Nagas. May he be glorified through this book, and may your own heart be revived as you read the wonderful things he has done in Nagaland!"*

**Rev Gwayhunlo Khing**

Director of Asia Soul Winners and former pastor of the Rengma Baptist Church, Kohima, Nagaland

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